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THE

ARCTIC EXPEDITIONS.

COX AND BAYLIS, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LONDON.

THE

ARCTIC EXPEDITIONS.

A POEM.

MERCANTILE LIBRARY PHILAD

By MISS PORDEN.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

1818.

The doubtful fate of the Colony believed to have been once established on the Eastern Coast of Greenland, and the possibility of a passage to the Pole, are subjects on which for some years my mind has dwelt with peculiar interest; this feeling was again excited when I heard of the great revolution in the Polar Seas, which made it probable that the one might be reached, and the fate of the other ascertained. The following lines were prompted by a visit to His Majesty's ships the Alexander and Isabella, lying at Deptford, on Monday the 30th instant. The objects of the expeditions of which these vessels form a part, the dangers they may have to encounter, and their prospects of success, have been made so familiar to every one by the

very able and delightful article in the last Quarterly Review, and the disquisitions to which it has given rise, that any details are unnecessary. The prayers of science and humanity will attend the voyagers on their way, and whatever may be their success, the historian and the bard will find pleasure in recording it. Should this short and hasty effusion (not originally intended for the public eye) meet with the indulgence shewn to a former work, it is possible that I may then resume the theme.

ELEANOR ANNE PORDEN.

March 31, 1818.

THE

ARCTIC EXPEDITIONS.

Sail, sail, adventurous Barks! go fearless forth,
Storm on his glacier-seat the misty North,
Give to mankind the inhospitable zone,
And Britain's trident plant in seas unknown.
Go! sure, wherever Science fills the mind
Or grief for man long sever'd from his kind,*
That anxious nations watch the changing gales,
And prayers and blessings swell your flagging sails.

No Muse of all that hymn'd Saturnian Jove
On Pindus' top, or in Hæmonia's grove,

* The inhabitants (if any) of lost Greenland.

Must prompt the strain; Thou! beacon of their way,
Star of the Pole! inspire the arduous lay.
And thou, unseen Directress!—Power unknown!
Shrined darkling on thine adamantine throne,
Who lov'st, like Virtue, still to shrink from view
And bless a world, yet shun the glory due;
While yet they seek thee o'er a trackless main,
Guide of their course! befriend their poet's strain.*

And you, aspiring Youths! heroic band!
Who leave, by Science led, your native land:
Undaunted steer where none have mark'd the way,
Whom danger damps not, nor whom toils dismay.
You, no green islands of the West invite,†
No dangerous Capua,‡ nurse of soft delight;

* See Additional Note on the Magnet at the end.

† Alluding to the Fortunate Islands, supposed to be the Canaries, of which the antients left fanciful descriptions that lured many navigators to sail in quest of them.

‡ Capua was long proverbial as destructive of the courage and virtue

No paradise where yet mankind is pure,*
No flowery fields or balmy gales allure.
Fatigue and frost, and storms, and death, you brave,
Where none are near, to witness or to save.

Four times the sun his hundred courses ran,†
Another circle of the years began,

of the Roman legions. Otaheite proved almost as fatal to the navigators by whom it was first visited.

* In allusion to the blameless colony founded by Adams on Pitcairn's Island, near Otaheite; or to the "Arcadian" inhabitants of Lew Chew.

† On the east coast of Greenland, commonly called East Greenland, till Spitzbergen usurped the name, was formerly a colony of 20,000 inhabitants. They had been converted to Christianity, possessed many Churches and Convents, and received their bishops from Norway; but in 1406, when the seventeenth bishop sailed to take possession of his see, an immense barrier of ice prevented him from reaching the coast; and since then the fate of its inhabitants is unknown, every attempt having been frustrated by the increasing ices, till last year, when

Since one fair land—Yes! though the seas were frore,
Green were the pastures of its summer shore;
Its hardy natives loved with keen delight
Their one long day, and yet their longer night:
But from the hour when on the ice-bound coast,
In vain their prelate sought his people lost,
Each winter piled increasing glaciers round,
And man, in terror, shunn'd the guarded ground.

Oh! did its sons beneath the withering gale,
Behold each year their scantier herbage fail,
The South still wont with light and joy to bring
The friendly fleets, the short yet fruitful Spring,

this enormous mass was broken up, and sent its gigantic fragments to astonish the inhabitants of warmer seas. Greenland received its name from its superior verdure in comparison with Iceland. Its people were of gentle and honest dispositions, and remarkable for their attachment to their inhospitable climate. Their summer was from six weeks to two months. *Quart. Rev. No.* 35.

Changed to their keenest blast—Oh! has their sight
Been strained o'er growing realms of dreary white,
While each clear iceberg, floating o'er the main,
Seemed a white sail, and wakened hope again;
Till fancied outcasts, both of heaven and man,
E'en to their hearts the piercing coldness ran;
O'er blasted fields they roll'd their stiffening eyes,
And sunk the victims of th'unpitying skies.

Or have they lived, to prove th'Almighty hand
Showers blessings e'en on that secluded land,
That fortitude can warm that frozen air,
And clothe in flowers that region of despair!

But lo! the barrier bursts, on distant seas*
Those floating winters chill the sultry breeze;

* These floating mountains, of some leagues in circumference, have been met in the Atlantic as far down as the fortieth parallel of latitude,

Vast piles of ice, now bright with heavenly blue,
Now tinged by setting suns with flamy hue,
Southward they sail, and Gades' vine-clad coast,
And burning Afric feel the unwonted frost.

The barrier bursts—and Britain, first of all
Wherever perils threat, or duties call,
Sends forth her heroes.—What shall be their joy,
When first that long lost country dims the sky;
What their's the melancholy task to trace
The last sad relics of a perish'd race;
Or should they live, to bless the niggard spot,
Pour on their ears a language half forgot;
Teach them again to till the barren sod,
And praise once more a long neglected God;*

and I believe even lower. They are said, for this year, to have destroyed every prospect of the vintage in Portugal.

* It will be curious to observe, should any of these secluded beings yet live, what changes their situation has produced in their language,

Again their light canoes shall sail, again
Shall milder Summers rear their golden grain :
Nay, long by frosts opprest,—our happier clime
Again shall hail returning Summer's prime ;
Its ruddy grapes shall lavish Autumn bring,
And all Sicilia's sweets adorn the Spring.*

No day-dreams these of Bard's fantastic brain,
This Summer's lapse shall realize the strain.

manners, and religion. Whether they have deteriorated into barbarism as their climate became more rigorous, or have been roused to new activity by the necessity of contending with the elements.

* It is calculated that not only all the northern coasts, and unhappy Iceland, so long condemned to witness the increasing rigour of her climate, her winters rendered doubly keen, and her summers blighted by the neighbourhood of this icy coast ; but that Britain itself will feel the advantage of its removal—that the vine will again flourish here as it did in the time of our ancestors, and our spring once more realize the descriptions of our elder poets. *Quart. Rev.*

Go forth, brave Seamen, reach the fated shore,
Go! doomed to honours never reaped before,
Nor fear strange tales that brooding ignorance teems,
Wild fictions, borrowed from Arabian dreams; *
Fear not, while months of dreary darkness roll,
To stand self-centred on the attractive Pole;
Or find some gulf, deep, turbulent, and dark,
Earth's mighty mouth! suck in the struggling bark;
Fear not, the victims of magnetic force,
To hang, arrested in your midmost course;
Your prows drawn downward and your sterns in air,
To waste with cold, and grief, and famine, there:
Strange fancies these—but real ills are near,
Not clothed in all the picturesque of fear,
Which makes its wild distortions wildly dear;
Nor like the rush of fight, when burning zeal
Forbids the heart to quail, the limbs to feel—

* Vide the History of Sindbad the Sailor; also of Abaoulfaouaris in the Persian Tales.

Long patient suffering, when the frozen air
Seems almost solid, and the painful glare
Of endless snow destroys the dazzled sight;
When fatal slumber comes with dreadful weight;
When every limb is pain, or deadlier yet,
When those chill'd limbs the sense of pain forget;
Awful it is to gaze on shoreless seas,
But more to view those restless billows freeze
One solid plain, or when like mountains piled,
Whole leagues in length, of forms sublimely wild,
In dreadful war the floating icebergs rush,
Horrent with trees that kindle as they crush; *
The flickering compass points with fitful force,
And not a star in heaven directs your course,

* The icebergs are frequently covered with the trunks of trees and stony fragments, which have given rise to the idea that they are avalanches from the steep coast of New Siberia; when they rush together the frozen timber is said frequently to inflame from the violence of the collision.

But the broad sun, through all the endless day,* 110
Wheels changeless round, sole beacon of your way;
Or through a night more dreadful, doomed to roam
Unknowing where, and hopeless of a home.
Dense fogs, dark floating on the frozen tide,
Veil the clear stars that yet might be your guide;
And vainly conscious that for weeks on high,†
The moon shines glorious in a cloudless sky;
For you she shines not, doom'd to wait in fear
Some glacier, fatal in its wild career,

* Towards the middle of the polar day of six months, the sun must continue for some weeks nearly at the same elevation, and the time of course can be estimated only by his easterly or westerly position.

† Alluding to the phenomenon of the Arctic moon, which, in the middle of the polar night or winter,

Still shines erected on th'etherial plain,
Nor bathes her blazing forehead in the main

for a fortnight together.

That comes immense in shadowy whiteness, known
By the damp chill that wraps your heart, alone ;*
Or deadlier still, in silence hemm'd around
By gathering ice, in firmer fetters bound :
Darkling you ply your saws with fruitless toil, †
Yourselves the nucleus of a mighty isle ;
While the red meteors, quivering through the sky,‡
Disclose the dangers now too late to fly,
And light the bears that urge their dangerous way,
And famish'd growl, impatient of their prey.

MERCANTILE LIBRARY PHILADA

* During the fogs which so often are the principal impediments to navigation in high latitudes, the coming of an ice island is known only by the dreadful chill that precedes it, and a whiteness in the fog.

† In allusion to the ice-saws with which the vessels destined for these expeditions are provided.

‡ In Arctic regions a crackling noise is heard during the appearance of the Aurora Borealis.

Yet Britons! Conquerors on the subject deep,
Where'er its islands rise, its waters sweep,
Fired by your fathers' deathless deeds, defy
The frozen ocean, and the flaming sky;
Secure, though not one vessel speck the wave,
ONE EYE beholds you, and ONE ARM shall save;
That HE, who gives those mighty agents force,
Can guard his creatures and can stay their course;
And as, when parted on those lonely realms,
To different stars you turn your faithful helms,
On to your several quests undaunted press,
While courage seeks, but prudence wins, success:
Then should THAT POWER, whose smile your daring crown'd,
Again unite you on the vast profound,
Yourselves sole sovereigns of that awful zone,
Sole friends, sole rivals, on those seas unknown;
How shall your tongues on past deliverance dwell,
What joy, what praise, in every heart shall swell!

How shall each band admire, with mutual pride,
Their comrades' daring on th'unfathom'd tide;
These from Columbia's northern shores, shall claim
A portion of the great discoverer's fame:
Tell of the perils of a rocky coast;
Of barren regions, desolate in frost;
Of savage nations fell with thirst of blood,
Or in their kindness, hospitably rude;*
What unknown verdure clothes their gelid shore;
What arts they practise, and what gods adore.

Then shall their rivals from the Arctic main,
Of all its monsters speak in loftier strain:
Strange forms and huge, that late we smiled to hear,
When drest by fancy, and enlarged by fear,

* The "peine forte et dure" by which an Icelander compels his satiated guests to eat, and the steam from hot stones with which the Kamschatkadale would drive him from the plenteous meal he provides, are sufficient illustrations of this line.

(For rarely travellers forged the willing lie,
The wise may doubt, but only fools deny);
Perchance how near they marked the Kraken sweep,
Or him, the serpent-monarch of the deep,*
Whose folds upon the troubled waters curl'd,
Seem'd vast as Midgard's, that involve the world;†

* The sea snake, cast on shore on the Orkneys in 1808, and the still more gigantic animal of the same kind which made its appearance near Boston in America last summer, put the existence of one of Pontoppidan's Arctic monsters beyond a doubt; and make it probable that some animal, in part answering his description of the Kraken, may be found in the Polar basin. It is to be hoped, however, that the removal of the icy barriers which perhaps confined them there, may not send them forth to the terror of warmer latitudes. So many reputed "travellers' wonders" have lately been confirmed, that one might feel tempted to exclaim, with Antonio in the Tempest,

"Travellers ne'er did lie,
"Though fools at home condemn them."

† The Great Serpent of Midgard which is supposed to encircle the

Or reared above the mast, with hideous noise,
Shook his thick mane, and roll'd his flaming eyes.

Or of that hour, when, centered on the Pole,
Round them the Earth, the Sea, appeared to roll,
Nay, the bright Sun, and all those fires that burn
With native lustre, seem'd round them to turn.

Then, Britons! as to southern climes you bend,
And each clear star appears an ancient friend,
How shall you love to muse on vanquish'd ill,
On well earned fame, or visions sweeter still,
The heart-felt welcome to your native land,
The dear embrace, the gratulating hand,
When joyful thousands throng the white-cliff'd shore,
To greet as brothers men unseen before:

earth, and makes a conspicuous figure in Scandinavian mythology. The serpent of Pontoppidan has probably been his original.

On each strong limb, each storm-worn feature dwell,
Yourselves more wondrous than the tales you tell.

Then on ! undaunted heroes, bravely roam,
Your toils, your perils, shall endear your home,
And furnish tales for many a winter night,
While wondering Britons list with strange delight,
Or tell with patriot pride and grateful soul,
Lo ! these the men who dared explore the Pole,
On icy seas the lion flag unfurl'd,
And found new pathways to the Western World.

Lo, throned on Ice, like that tremendous shape
Great Gama saw, that guards the Stormy Cape,*
With robes of mist, and eyes of glassy glare,
And meteors crackling in his blazing hair,

* See the Lusiad of Camoëns. The appearance of the spirit at the "Cape of Storms," or Cape of Good Hope, is esteemed one of the finest passages in the poem.

The Genius of the North—I see him stand,
And lanch his frozen arrows from his hand,
To crush your barks—in vain—with steady blow,
Britannia's trident lays the giant low—
Queen of the Seas! she hails her conquering train,
Pleased with the prowess that confirms her reign.

ADDITIONAL NOTE.

(Vide p. 8.)

One of the objects of the Arctic Expedition is to discover the North Magnetic Pole, which is supposed to be at present situated near Davis's Streights, from the great irregularities in the motion of the needle observed in that quarter. I have said *at present*, because it is believed that the Poles of the Magnet have a periodical revolution round the Poles of the Earth, which is completed in about 322 years; for in 1576, when the variation of the magnetic meridian was first observed, it had then an inclination of 11 deg. 25 min. east, which gradually decreased till the year 1657, when the magnetic meridian passed London, or

in other words, the needles in this metropolis pointed due north. From that time the westerly variation has continually increased to its present maximum of 24 deg. 30 min. and it is now said to have commenced its return towards the east. It is worthy of remark, that at this very period the dislocation of the Ice-bank of Old Greenland took place. In 1979, the magnetic meridian will probably again coincide with the meridian of London.

It is a curious fact that the south magnetic pole does not appear to be situated so near to the south pole of the earth as the north magnetic pole is to that of our hemisphere; Dr. Halley places it in lat. 58 deg. south, a little to the south of the Island of Desolation. Some philosophers have thought it probable that the earth may have four magnetic poles, two of inferior attraction to the others, an arrangement which would explain many of the anomalies of magnetic variation; but

it wants the beautiful simplicity observable in astronomical revolutions. Such a number of poles, however, is often found in the loadstone, and may be produced in artificial magnets. Nay, it does not appear necessary that the number of the northern and the southern poles should be the same. There is often a difference of one.

It may not be irrelevant to notice the valuable discovery made by Captain Flinders during his voyage to Australasia or New Holland, that the magnetic variation often differs on board the same ship at the same time, when the prow is turned in different directions. This phenomenon is believed to arise from the iron of the ship becoming magnetic, and thus influencing the compass. In an experiment made in the English Channel, off the Start Point, a difference of 8 deg. was found. When the head of the vessel pointed to the north, the variation indicated was 25 deg. 50 min.; with

the head to the west 29 deg. 50 min.; with the head to the south again 25 deg. 50 min., and to east only 21 deg. 50 min.; the variation in the northern hemisphere being constantly increased when the vessel was turned to the west, and diminished when it pointed to the east. A contrary effect of course takes place in the southern hemisphere. The quantity of error is not, however, conformable to the latitude of the ship but to the dip of the needle, and wherever that agrees the quantity of the variation will be the same, and consequently there will be no error where there is no dip, that is, on the magnetic equator. But in other situations it is only when the ship is turned in the magnetic meridian that the true variation can be ascertained. Captain Flinders reckons that many ships are lost annually from ignorance of this fact. If their course be north and south it is of little importance; but if in voyages to the east or west the vessel hold on its return an *apparent* reverse course to that held in going out, an

error must arise, which we have seen may be in some cases 8 degrees, and even more. A much slighter mistake may frequently be fatal.

These circumstances, so necessary to be generally known, have hitherto been confined to Captain Flinders' narrative, and to a small summary of his observations by Mr. Bain, till they were detailed in a popular form by Professor Millington, in his highly interesting course on Magnetism, just concluded at the Royal Institution.

The appearance of the aurora borealis is observed to occasion a flickering in the needle, and it has thence been inferred, perhaps somewhat hastily, that there exists a connection between magnetism and electricity; but as iron and steel are the only metals known to possess magnetic virtues, it would be well to ascertain what portion of the effect depends on their power as conductors of electricity, which they possess in common with all the metals. This might easily be done by sus

pending needles of any other metals under precisely the same circumstances, and observing whether any similar motions were excited in them by the electricity of the aurora borealis.

THE END.

COX AND BAYLIS, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LONDON.